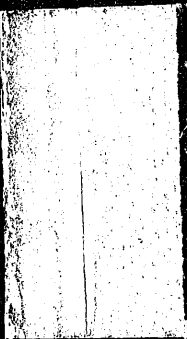


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A REVIEW

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BY SIXTUS.

NEW YORK:
CHARLES L. WEBSTER & CO.
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A REVIEW

-OF-

Professor Briggs's Inaugural Address.

IN the month of January of the present year, Professor Charles A. Briggs delivered an address on the occasion of his inauguration in the chair of Biblical Theology in the Union Seminary of New York. This address, which has since been printed and published, has already excited a considerable amount of comment and criticism. The occasion upon which it was delivered gave additional importance to the statement of doctrine which Professor Briggs then made. The professorship is a new one. Professor Briggs is the first one to hold it.

The audience, assembled to hear what we may call the "programme" of instruction, was a large and distinguished one. Besides the Seminary Faculty and graduates, the students and their friends, there were present representatives of the Episcopal Seminary of New York, of the Congregational Seminary of New Haven, and many others well known in the religious

world. Indeed, one may regard it as a hopeful sign of Christian unity that the Protestant Episcopal Bishop of New York should have kindly written a letter in which Professor Briggs was said to be beloved on account of his failings. For this will lead many to the belief that even if there be a danger, as some suspect that there is, of a schism in the Presbyterian Church, by reason of the prevalence of radical doctrine, some erring souls, after leaving the Presbyterian fold, may find a place among the "dearly beloved brethren" who have an elastic creed and the "historic episcopate."

The chair of Dogmatic Theology, left vacant by the resignation of the venerable Professor Shedd, has not yet been filled. But in the meantime, the seminary is not without an instructor who is ready to discuss some of the more important questions of doctrine in a manner so easy and fluent as to captivate, if not to convince, many of his hearers and readers.

As a theologian as distinguished from a literary critic of the Bible, Professor Briggs has a reputation founded on a short treatise of theology, entitled "Whither?" This appeared to many to be an argument to show that what the Presbyterian Church teaches now is not what Presbyterian doctrine really is. The inference implied was, that while Presbyterians were be-

lieving something new and unpresbyterian, they might as well believe in the doctrines disseminated by what are often known as the "new theologians." Vague speculations, hints, and criticisms have for some time past awakened a curiosity concerning the doctrines really taught at the Union Seminary. The address of Professor Briggs has thrown some light on this subject, and we are enabled to form an idea of the doctrines which have been so widely criticised.

Some of the professors at Union Seminary have an interesting reputation for their definite teaching, and their intellectual grasp of Presbyterian theology. President Hastings, for example, has never been accused of undermining old doctrines or of setting up new ones. His occasional articles in the religious newspapers, and his lectures on rhetoric at the seminary, have never been looked upon as dangerous to the orthodox faith of his readers and hearers. Professor Brown is well known as a learned orientalist and a bold critic, but he has been but little criticised by conservative people. The other members of the faculty have escaped suspicion, while the burden or honor of such suspicion has rested upon Professor Briggs. There have been rumors of his inclination toward Rationalism, and what Car-

dinal Newman once called "Germanism." But every one has felt that with some of the conservative clergy on the Board of Directors, no danger was to be apprehended from Professor Briggs's opinions.

Indeed, on reading the pamphlet which contains his address, we are obliged to confess that it contains nothing very new or startling. The only thing that is new and startling is that such doctrines should be taught by a professor in a Presbyterian seminary. Most Presbyterian laymen are very intelligent with respect to the "faith that is in them." But not all laymen can be experts concerning such doctrines as those of the Higher Criticism, Inspiration, and the Future State. When they are in doubt, they often seek aid from their pastors, or, if the question be one of great moment, they may go for definite information to the instructors in the theological seminaries. Every Presbyterian layman knows that unless a man subscribe to the Westminster standards he cannot be a clergyman of the Presbyterian Church, and he supposes that the clergy are honest enough to mean what they say when they so subscribe. Assuming that Professor Briggs's teaching is accepted by the students who attend lectures at the Union Seminary, it becomes a matter of no small importance to laymen who may here-

after enjoy the ministrations of these young brethren, to know in what way Professor Briggs interprets the standards. Our Presbyterian brethren tell us that "Revision is in the air," and it seems to us that the air is so agitated that men are driven about by every wind of doctrine. No one knows as yet just what the result of revision will be, but Professor Briggs has contradicted what the *Confession* teaches on several important points. We do not care to do more than to suggest that he is in a dilemma, for if we were to state the dilemma, we should find heresy at one horn, and disingenuousness at the other.

The title of Professor Briggs's inaugural address is "The Authority of the Holy Scriptures," and he could not have chosen a more suitable subject. To a Presbyterian the matter is a vital one. If the authority of the Holy Scriptures be assailed, then Presbyterian doctrine is assailed.

We observe, however, that at the very beginning of his discourse, Professor Briggs touches on various philosophical questions, and handles them in a way which shows a very mistaken conception of the history of philosophy, as well as of philosophical procedure. Indeed, we are by no means surprised at his frequent animadversions on dogmatic theology, when we

find throughout the address so many evidences of logical inconsistency, logical errors, and—if we may be permitted to say so—philosophical ignorance. He tells us with great candor that “Logic and syllogism, system and method need constant criticism, verification, and revision.”* Such things seem to him to be a cause of obscurity and vexation. And he breaks out into an almost feminine expression of emotion as he contemplates systematic theology: “Oh, when will men learn that the Bible means exactly what it says!”*

The professor deals very impatiently with the scholasticism of the mediæval theologians, as well as that of the Reformers. But whatever may have been the faults of those writers, it is certain that in their works there is no such display of confused, contradictory, and illogical thought as we have found in the pages of this pamphlet. In saying this, we mean no disrespect to the author, for it is seldom that one who has spent his life in the study of language, Hebrew texts, and manuscripts, and German commentators, can be expected to show great proficiency in dialectic and philosophical discussion.

We leave to others the diverting task of comparing Professor Briggs’s opinions with the

* p. 49.

standards which he has solemnly promised to support. In another place we shall have occasion to allude to this, but, for the present, shall content ourselves with a consideration of some of the more philosophical aspects of his position. It may be only fancy, but we have an impression that we have read a great deal of what Professor Briggs teaches, expressed in a much more clever manner by Spinoza, Voltaire, and certain of the Tübingen theologians; but inasmuch as it is the fashion to call this kind of thought the "new" theology, as if it had somehow been born on the corner of Park Avenue and Sixty-ninth Street, we prefer to treat it as a theological novelty.

In spite of his impatience of scholastic methods and of scholastic dogmas, Professor Briggs entertains certain views with regard to the principles of religious thought, which lead him, whether he will or not, into the very heart of that theological country which he affects to despise. This is evident at the outset, where he refers with such solemnity, but with such inadequate comprehension of its significance, to the test of truth.

"Probability might be the guide of life in the eighteenth century, and for those who have inherited its traditions, but the men of this time are in quest of certainty. Divine authority is

the only authority to which man can yield implicit obedience; on which he can rest in loving certainty and build with joyous confidence." *

Now this temper, this quest after certainty in the philosophical sense of the term, has been characteristic of almost every philosopher from the time of the Sophists to the present day. And it is this temper which has more than anything else been productive of infidelity and absolute skepticism. Professor Briggs does not say that such a tendency is to be commended, but from the context it appears that such is his opinion. This demand for certainty, we might almost say for apodictic certainty, was fully as characteristic of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as of the nineteenth.

No one who has read the *Meditations of Descartes* can have failed to notice that impressive mental struggle and conflict through which he passed, before he found that the only and ultimate certainty was the fact that he doubted, and that on the foundation of doubt itself he might rear his dogmatic system. The same characteristic is to be found in the philosophy of Pascal. And if we pass from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century, which, according to Professor Briggs, was satisfied with probability as the guide of life, we are confront-

* p. 24.

ed by the Encyclopædists in France, by the leaders of the *Aufklaerung* in Germany, and in Great Britain by David Hume. It is indeed characteristic of the scholastic mind to seek after certainty, but Professor Briggs seems to think that he can reach certainty by means of his inductive methods. On the contrary, any one who knows anything at all about induction knows that it never gives apodictic certainty. It can give nothing more than probability. There is, indeed, a spurious so-called induction *per simplicem enumerationem*, which gives certainty, but logicians have long since ceased to regard it as a legitimate form of the inductive method. Wherever men have insisted on certainty, and have remained unsatisfied with a high degree of probability, there absolute skepticism has taken root on a congenial soil. But we decline to agree with Professor Briggs that this is a characteristic of the nineteenth century. It is a defect of the historic sense which leads so many superficial writers to claim for this century peculiarities which have belonged to many other centuries, and which, as in this case, do not belong to the nineteenth century at all.

Assuming, however, that certainty is to be reached, and assuming that we have a source of divine authority, let us examine this source

more specifically. According to Professor Briggs, it is threefold: "There are historically three fountains of divine authority—the Bible, the Church, and the Reason."*

If this be so, it might be natural to suppose that all three were equally authoritative, for they are all fountains which flow from God. It must not be supposed that all three teach identical doctrines. All that the professor means, we apprehend, is this, that each authority is divine in its own sphere. They are all means which lead to one end, and that end is God.

Now this position we hold to be utterly untenable. It is untenable specifically for the Presbyterian, but from a broader and more philosophical point of view, it is untenable for any one who does not follow Professor Briggs in his disregard of the rules of logic. It is of course highly desirable that Reason and Revelation should be in harmony with one another, and if both are sources of divine authority, that the autonomy of each should be preserved, but a little attention to historical facts, combined with a little more attention to the principles of disjunctive reasoning, might have led Professor Briggs away from the position in which he has balanced himself in such an

* p. 24.

amusing manner. He is apparently unconscious of this, for, speaking of the three sources, he says, "They are, they always have been, and they always will be harmonious." * But if that be true, then why does he say on the same page, "They ought to be complementary; there ought to be no contradiction between them. It is my profound conviction that we are on the threshold of just such a happy reconciliation."* Let us examine his position more closely.

One of the stock examples in elementary text-books of logic is that illustration of the fallacy of "equivocation," which occurs so often in discussions concerning the Church. The Church is said to be a source of divine authority which does not contradict the religion of the Bible or the religion of Reason. But what Church is this of which Professor Briggs speaks? We have searched his pamphlet from beginning to end for light on this subject, and have failed to find a satisfactory answer. Undoubtedly he has a satisfactory answer, as he is in quest of certainty. It would appear that the late Cardinal Newman † was a man who found God through the Church, in which case the Latin Church is meant. But the Bible as understood by Professor Briggs is contradictory to Catholic doctrine. And the Re-

* p. 64.

† p. 25.

formed doctrine, that is, the doctrine of the Reformed communions, is contradictory to the doctrines of the Church of the Middle Ages. But we should probably be told that Professor Briggs refers only to "Institutional Christianity" when he speaks of the Church. Doubtless this is true. But we see no reason for calling "Institutional Christianity" the Church, as if the former were a coherent, harmonious body of doctrine. What kind of Institutional Christianity are we to look for?

Shall we sit at the feet of the Nicene Fathers, or of the Tridentine Doctors, or of the Westminster Divines? Is it the Latin, or the Greek, or the English Church, or the Presbyterian Church, or the so-called Protestant Church which is the fountain of divine authority? We should probably be told that it is no one of these, but all of them. But if they differ with one another, how are we to decide which doctrines are to be accepted and which rejected? The Church contradicts itself. Indeed, Professor Briggs intimates that this source of authority has been a barrier to Revelation, a barrier between man and God. It is difficult not to smile at the absurdity of the author, telling us on one page that the Church is a source of divine authority, and on another page intimating that it is really an ob-

stacle which separates man from God. But little harm is done, for we submit that it is utterly impossible to tell what he means by the term "Church." We have heard a great deal of this kind of talk from the High-Church Episcopalians, who are fond of telling us what the "Church" teaches, meaning, by "Church," either the Church of the first four centuries which somehow speaks ambiguously, or the Book of Common Prayer, or the British Parliament, or the Tractarian writers, or the equivocal Thirty-nine Articles. The only conclusion that we have been able to reach is that Professor Briggs would have us accept the teaching of the Church, whatever that may be, only in so far as it is in agreement with the Bible and the Reason. The authority of the Church appears thus to be secondary to that of the Bible and the Reason. But if it is a source of divine authority, that is absurd.

This way of looking at authority is analogous to what sometimes happens in the family. The child should obey his parents. But if the father commands one thing, and the mother commands the opposite, the child is inclined to say: "I shall do as I please."

According to Professor Briggs, God is made known through the Reason.* When any one

* p. 26.

speaks of the "Reason," after the stormy philosophical controversies of the last two centuries, it is imperative that some clear definition of the Reason should be given. The professor says he speaks of the Reason, in a broad sense, "to embrace the metaphysical categories, the conscience, and the religious feeling."* We are disposed to doubt whether this is a broad sense in which to use the term. But, taking it for what it is worth as a definition, we are left in great perplexity as to what is meant. The term Reason is often used as antithetical to Nature, or as distinguished from Revelation. Either of these two senses we should regard as a broad sense of the word. But what does Professor Briggs mean by the metaphysical categories? There are many points in this address which we do not care to touch upon, involving, for example, questions of exegesis with which we are not familiar, but it does not do for even a Hebrew scholar like Professor Briggs to make excursions into the field of systematic philosophy without being a little more sure of his ground. He would doubtless be astonished if any one were to speak to him of the Pentateuch "written by the minor prophets," but such a mistake would be no worse than to use Reason as synony-

* p. 26.

mous with the metaphysical categories. Indeed one is tempted to ask what is meant by the "metaphysical categories?" Does he mean the metaphysical ideas of the Reason, or the categories of the understanding? The only metaphysical categories that we know of are those of Aristotle's *Organon*, and systems founded on it, and there is still some dispute as to whether the First Book of the *Organon* is to be regarded as a part of the Stagirite's *philosophia prima*. But if the Reason is identical with the categories, and also the same with the conscience and the religious feeling, then the professor is simply talking nonsense. There is no other name for it, or we would gladly use it. It is nonsensical and nothing else, to say that divine authority rests in the metaphysical categories, if it at the same time lies in Reason which is one with conscience and religious feeling. But according to Professor Briggs, this is the "Holy of Holies of Nature." * If by metaphysical forms or categories, Professor Briggs means the Categories of the Kantian Analytic, then it must be answered that according to Kant, the form without the matter, *i. e.*, without experience, is empty. It is difficult to determine whence the Reason can get any religious experience to fill

* p. 26.

these empty categories without the Bible and the Church.

"The vast multitude of men are guided by God through the forms of the Reason, without their having any consciousness of His presence or guidance. There are a few who are able to rise by reflection into the higher consciousness of God. These few are of the mystic type of religion; the men who have been the prophets of mankind, the founders of religions, the leaders of Revivals and Reformations, who, conscious of the divine presence within them, and certain of His guidance, lead on confidently in the paths of divine Providence." *

This tendency is likely to be prevalent after the pressure of a too formal Metaphysic. The claim ordinarily made by mystics is, that they have the power to rise in a kind of ecstasy to a direct apprehension of God and divine truth, unchecked by the limits of human thought. If there is a new Master Eckhardt or a new Fénelon at the Union Seminary, we have as yet failed to discover him, but it is possible that the existence of such a reactionist against the ordinary forms of rational procedure may be an explanation of the unintelligible doctrine which Professor Briggs sets forth. Some hint as to his meaning is perhaps given where he couples

* p. 26.

the term "Reason" with what is known in some quarters as the "Christian consciousness;" and we may notice for a moment the position of those who attach value to this vague term, borrowed, we believe, from Schleiermacher, and misunderstood by many American writers on theology.

Consciousness is a name given by psychologists to the source of immediate knowledge. No one would pretend that consciousness without inference, and without the activity of other more complex mental powers could solve the problems of textual criticism, or of canonical authenticity. If so, why all this study? why torture one with the discipline of research and linguistic specialties, if we have an immediate power which enables us to penetrate through the words to the very concept of divine revelation? We are not aware that the adjective "Christian" adds anything to the mediateness of consciousness. But everybody knows that Christian consciousness is only another name for the Reason, and that the appeal to Christian consciousness is only rationalism poorly disguised by a silly use of the philosophical vocabulary.

We do not suppose that any one would claim that the Christian consciousness was the source of any particular knowledge, but only a source of religious knowledge in general. To be con-

scious at all, one must be conscious of something. We may therefore ask, first, Of what is the Christian conscious? and secondly, Who are they who have this consciousness?

It has become almost an axiom of philosophy that the matter of all our knowledge is given through experience. This would imply that the matter of Christian consciousness, which is a kind of knowledge, is given through experience. To deny this is to accept the teaching of the mystic that the soul in religious knowledge transcends the bounds of ordinary knowledge, and possesses ecstatic knowledge of supernatural truth. But even ecstatic knowledge, if there be such a thing, is the result of ecstatic experience. The Catholic affirms that the matter of all religious knowledge comes through the teaching of the Church, and this is certainly the result of experience. The religious Protestant, that is, the Protestant Christian, has usually claimed that the matter of religious knowledge comes through the teaching of the Bible, which is a source of experience.

This Christian consciousness is not a critical faculty, for criticism is a function of the Reason, not of consciousness. We are asked to regulate our objective authorities, the Church and the Bible, by this uncritical faculty. But the Reason, which is the critical faculty, is itself

limited by the teaching of the Bible and the Church. The Christian consciousness will thus vary from age to age, according to the rational attitude of the people. It may even contradict itself. The test of religious truth seems to be its harmony with the Christian consciousness. Professor Briggs seems to see this absurdity, for he proceeds to point out that it is wrong to suppose that the Bible is the only rule of faith. He holds, as we have seen, that the Church and the Reason are sources of divine authority. It requires no ecclesiastical trial to demonstrate to any one who can read English that half an hour before he made this statement, Professor Briggs solemnly declared: "I believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice." The word "only" is significant, and the Church, the Reason, the Christian consciousness, the religious feeling, and the "metaphysical categories" are not mentioned.

At a trial for heresy before an ecclesiastical court, there would doubtless be some way of explaining away this evident contradiction. We have always noticed that men of heterodox opinions, who delight to astonish their conservative brethren and shock their conservative sisters by theological novelties before their orthodoxy has been officially condemned,

assume the attitude of an innocent martyr when their statements are repeated before the court of a church. But whether Professor Briggs's doctrines are in harmony with the *Confession of Faith* or not, what is the result of having three sources of divine revelation? The result is this, for history shows that these three sources, so far from being in harmony, have often been in deadly conflict: Sooner or later, doctrines of the Bible may be found to contradict those of the Reason, or doctrines of the Reason may be found inconsistent with those of the Church. Then the arbitration of the question will be doubtless left, by those who follow Professor Briggs, to the Christian consciousness.

In order that we may have no obstruction in the way of reaching the doctrine taught in the Bible, Professor Briggs has been so obliging as to destroy some of the barriers which stand in the way of our approach, and apparently, lest any one should be tempted to erect these barriers again, he has, if we may say so, dug a number of ditches about the Word of God, which are quite as obstructive as the barriers or fences which he thinks have been removed.

"The first barrier that obstructs the way to the Bible is superstition."*

* p. 30.

We have not found that kind of superstition very common to which Professor Briggs objects in the following passage of his address :

"But superstition is no less superstition if it take the form of Bibliolatry. It may be all the worse if it concentrate itself on one thing. But the Bible has no magical virtue in it, and there is no halo enclosing it. It will not stop a bullet any better than a mass-book. It will not keep off evil spirits any better than a cross. It will not guard a home from fire half so well as holy water. If you desire to know when and how you should take a journey, you will find a safer guide in an almanac or a daily newspaper. The Bible is no better than hydromancy or witchcraft, if we seek for divine guidance by the chance opening of the book. The Bible, as a book, is paper, print, and binding—nothing more."*

Doubtless, many of those at the inauguration exercises were much amused by these flashes of epigrammatic wit, and charmed as much by the delicate good taste of the comparisons, as they were grieved that people could be found so superstitious as to revere the paper, ink, and binding which are needed for presenting the Word of God to the use of men. Everybody will admit that the Bible can be misused. There

* p. 30.

is, of course, nothing inherently sacred in the paper, the binding, or the ink. All such veneration vanishes when the sentiment which prompts it is analyzed. But what is the object of this attack on a harmless feeling of reverence for these things? We shall soon see. In the meantime it may be said that some men have been found so foolishly sentimental as to preserve portraits of their father or their mother after the latter are dead and gone. They even have been known to go so far in their silly sentimentality as to carry such counterfeit presentments in their pockets, and would be ill pleased to have the sentiment which prompts them to do this, roughly analyzed. Sometimes people carry about with silly affection old letters, which they keep with reverence, and would not care to have mockingly alluded to.

What are these portraits and letters? The Professor Briggses of our social life would tell us that these are only bits of glass, or of cardboard, or of paper, or lines which time has faded, or which may have been blotted by tears. We should not care to have the Bible made a mere charm or fetich for the ignorant. But this paragrapher's smartness with which the professor treats the subject, has no relevance to the reverent handling of the Holy Scriptures, nor—and this is the point which we would emphasize

—has it any relevance whatever to the question whether or not the Bible is originally inspired. If by Bibliolatry be meant reverence for the words of Scripture, whether printed, written, or spoken, let us be Bibliolaters, without adding to this the worship of the Human Reason, and of that curious Church of which Professor Briggs speaks. Is Bibliolatry the only form of idolatry which has been prevalent among Protestants? We object to these strangely constructed terms, but it will occur to some that there is Ecclesiolatry and Noölatry as well as Bibliolatry in the Union Seminary. We cheerfully pass by these pleasantries of Professor Briggs, which are not to be taken seriously. By all means, let him have his sorry jests at the expense of a few aged women and some eccentric persons, who are wont to treat the Bible as a lamp to their feet. We are dealing with the logical aspects of his address, and decline to be led astray by this fallacy which can be detected by a junior at any of our American colleges. Let us consider the doctrine of inspiration.

Professor Briggs rejects the doctrine of verbal inspiration.

“The second barrier keeping men from the Bible is the dogma of verbal inspiration. . . . No such claim is found in the Bible itself or in

any of the creeds of Christendom. And yet it has been urged by the common opinion of modern evangelicalism that there can be no inspiration without verbal inspiration. . . . There are those who hold that thought and language are as inseparable as body and soul. But language is rather the dress of thought. A master of many languages readily clothes the same thought in half-a-dozen different languages. The same thought in the Bible itself is dressed in different literary styles, and the thought of the one is as authoritative as the thought of the other. The divine authority is not in the style or in the words, but in the concept, and so the divine power of the Bible may be transferred into any human language. . . . We force our way through the language and the letter, the grammar, and the style, to the inner substance of the thought, for there, if at all, we shall find God."*

This passage shows that it has been hardly wise for Professor Briggs to claim as much as he does for the inspiration of the Bible. But he is apparently utterly unable to estimate the logical consequences which follow from his reckless and often contradictory statements. His contempt of the logicians has been carried so far that he is exposed to a cross-fire from the

* p. 31.

supernaturalists, on the one hand, and from what he calls the "victorious army of critics," on the other hand.

And so the divine authority or inspiration is to be found in the concept, not in the words? We are much amused at the engaging frankness with which Professor Briggs gives expression to a doctrine which depends for its validity on the conclusions of that very scholasticism which he affects to despise. This may not be fully appreciated by Professor Briggs, but will be well understood by those who have some knowledge of the difficult question of the relation of thought to language. The words of the Bible are not inspired, but the concept is inspired. Let Professor Briggs turn for a while from his study of Lessing, Kuenen, Wellhausen, Weiss, and other German critics, and let him read Prantl's *Geschichte der Logik*, or any textbook which deals with the history of the concept, and he will find that he has made his doctrine of inspiration depend on a logical theory which has been long since abandoned by every competent logician.

We do not maintain that men cannot think without language, although that is the prevailing opinion among men of science at the present time. But we do maintain that the only way in which the knowledge of a concept,

whether it be inspired or not, can be made known is by the use of language. If a concept cannot be expressed in language, it must remain forever unknown. It is therefore a matter of no consequence that the Bible has been fenced in by all kinds of creeds and dogmas; for even if the fences were pulled down the inner substance would remain inaccessible.

Let us rather pray that we may have something of the mystic's insight, and, going out of the Church in order to become Christians, like those described by Professor Bruce,* may find all the revelation of God in the Christian consciousness.

Not only are the Holy Scriptures not inspired, but, according to Professor Briggs, their authenticity is doubtful. He does not even express the opinion that they have divine authenticity. † It is encouraging to find him, at this point, using against his opponents a weapon of the logicians whom he so much despises. He has, it seems, caught some of the advocates of "authenticity" in reasoning *in circulo*, just as he caught the superstitious evil-doers using the Bible instead of holy water in putting out their fires. It is a pleasure to see how Professor Briggs seems to revel in the idea that he has caught his opponents napping. But all the while he seems

* p. 41.

† pp. 32, 33.

quite unconscious of the fatal defect in his own argument. Let us sum up his doctrine, and our objection will be proved.

The concept is inspired. But we do not know who wrote some of the books of the Bible. We know that Moses and David did not write just the books which the New Testament on the authority of Christ and the Apostles says that they did. How, then, shall we tell what is inspired, and what is not? By the Higher Criticism, that is, by Reason and the Christian consciousness, perhaps by the religious feeling. These are, according to Professor Briggs, sources of divine authority. Indeed the metaphysical categories are inspired, whatever they may be. And the concept is inspired, whatever that may be; but the inspired concept is incommunicable because the language is not inspired. We leave it to any candid and logical person to say whether this kind of reasoning is anything but a fallacy of the most shallow kind. Truly Professor Briggs has been too much occupied with Hebrew grammar, or with the literature of Tübingen to speak *ex cathedra* on logical subjects.

Professor Briggs rejects the doctrine of the inerrancy of the Scriptures, as well as that of verbal inspiration. He reaches this conclusion:

“But on what authority do these theologians

drive men from the Bible by this theory of inerrancy? The Bible itself nowhere makes this claim. The creeds of the Church nowhere sanction it. It is a ghost of modern evangelicism to frighten children." The errors of the Bible are "all in the circumstantial and not in the essentials; they are in the human setting, and not in the precious jewel itself." "If we should abandon the whole field of providential superintendence so far as inspiration and divine authority are concerned, and limit divine inspiration and authority to the essential contents of the Bible . . . we should still have ample room to seek divine authority where alone it is essential, or even important, in the teaching that guides our devotions, our thinking, and our conduct." *

What, then, are the essential contents of the Holy Scriptures? Assuming that Professor Briggs has shown the Word of God, as he calls the Bible, to be uninspired, and not inerrant, which assumption, by the way, throws a strange light on his conception of the truthfulness of God, we should like to know in what way it is proposed to determine what parts of Scripture are inspired, and what parts are purely human. Is this a matter of opinion, or is it a matter of principle?

* pp. 35, 36.

If Reason does not make mistakes, and if Reason is an avenue which leads us to God, if the determination of what is divine truth rests on the Reason or on Christian consciousness, then the test of what is divinely inspired is independent of the Bible and of the Church. The test of truth becomes subjective: we must find out whether Revelation is agreeable to the Christian consciousness. It seems to us that such a Protogorean method, so far from bringing us to the concept of revelation, raises a new barrier not contemplated by Professor Briggs. It is the barrier of human imperfection, the barrier of theological pretensions, and in this instance, the barrier of Professor Briggs himself. We fear that so seductive a reasoner as Professor Briggs has been the means of awakening in the minds of his followers, as well as in his own mind, a new form of idolatry almost as insidious as either Bibliolatry, or the reverence paid to holy water.

When a critic with such tendencies approaches the subject of miracles, he becomes apologetic and timid. For even the Christian consciousness has revolted at times against miracles. In such cases it is easy to discern the real motive for all this rationalistic thinking, the advocates of which fear to be logical lest they should be formally accused of heresy.

This motive is a secret aversion to Supernaturalism. One may see in the following passage how the timidity of a secret unbeliever is adroitly veiled in the hypothetical proposition in which the doctrine of miracles is discussed:

"If it were possible to resolve all the miracles of the Old Testament into extraordinary acts of Divine Providence, using the forces and forms of nature in accordance with the laws of nature; and if we could explain all the miracles of Jesus, His unique authority over man and over nature, from His use of mind cure, or hypnotism, or any other occult power, still I claim that nothing would be lost from the miracles of the Bible." *

We commend this sentence to the supernaturalists in the Presbyterian Church. Do they believe it or not? Whether it be a true proposition or not, it is the expression of a form of prevalent infidelity. If Professor Briggs should say that one had no right to assume that he meant any more than he says, we should reply that we had pierced our way through the language to the concept, and we claim that the same Higher Criticism is legitimate when applied to the word of Professor Briggs which is legitimate when applied to the Word of God.

One has only to compare this passage of his

* p. 37.

address with his previously stated doctrine of miracles, to be aware of the self-contradictory nature of his argument.

"Christian men may construct their theories about the miracles of the Bible with entire freedom, so long as they do not deny the reality of the events themselves as recorded in Holy Scriptures." *

That is to say, all this previous caution is unnecessary; for when it is recorded that the fish swallowed Jonah, or that Elijah went up by a whirlwind into Heaven, or that Jesus turned water into wine, these miracles are to be believed, however they may be explained.

In closing this part of his argument Professor Briggs says:

"It is the teaching of God that men are anxious to know; the theology of the Bible itself is what they are craving. The teaching of men and the theology of creeds and theologians no longer content them. These all have their place and importance, but they cannot take the place of the theology of the Bible and the authority of God."†

This is the kind of rhetoric which one is accustomed to hear in addresses by those devout but ignorant men who wander about, calling themselves by various names, claiming that the

* pp. 37, 38.

† pp. 41, 42.

Bible is enough for them, and that they need no Church, no creed, no symbols of faith. They overlook the fact that the Bible enjoins all of these. But these ideas are seldom expressed by professors in institutions of learning. When members of the clergy of an organized Church hold such views as these, one is tempted to ask why they remain in any Church at all. Indeed, it would seem that Professor Briggs wished to have the monopoly of strictly theological teaching at the Union Seminary, for the words we have just quoted apply as much to Dogmatic Theology as they do to anything else. It will strike many persons as extraordinary that professors of Polemics and of Apologetics should be retained in Presbyterian schools of theology, when the doctrines to be attacked from these chairs are in many cases those which are not condemned when they are advanced by the professor of Biblical Theology in New York.

No one is obliged to remain in a Church which requires of its clergy the profession of a dogmatic creed, No one will be confined in a dungeon, nor burned at the stake for heresy, if he chooses to renounce the doctrines of any religious body in Christendom. But we are unable to understand the moral principles according to which a man acts, who not only re-

mains in the Presbyterian ministry, holding views like those of Professor Briggs, but who, after subscribing to the narrowest and most precise of all Protestant symbols, speaks with such flippant disregard of the theology of creeds and theologians. It is only the opinions of men like Professor Briggs which make us doubt the consistency of such a term as "Biblical Theology."

The teacher who has removed the barriers surrounding the Bible, and the fences which once stood about the inspired concept, proceeds to show what the Bible really contains, and while allowance must be made on account of the brief time at the disposal of the speaker at his inauguration, we are somewhat surprised at the desultory harangue which appears under the head of "the Theology of the Bible." It makes, indeed, a very fair sermon, and shows us that Professor Briggs's qualifications as a pastor are superior to his ability as a logician. He appears to far better advantage than in those passages where he is struggling in vain to express with consistency strictly theological opinions.

There are, however, several parts of the latter half of his address, which we cannot pass over without comment.

Professor Briggs is afraid that the Dogmatic

Theology of the Church has given men false ideas of God and of the redemption. In order to remedy this wrong, he proceeds to sum up, in a rambling and illogical manner, what man ought to believe about the chief doctrines of the Bible. But any one so conscientious as he is, so desirous of removing misconceptions of Biblical truth from the minds of others, so distressed at the errors of traditional thought, and at the wicked devices of theologians to pervert what the Bible teaches, should be more careful in the treatment of doctrines the meaning of which he fails to understand. As we have said, this part of the address would make a fair sermon, but we consider it a preposterous synopsis of Biblical Theology to come from a man of learning and piety.

There is first Professor Briggs's doctrine of God. God is love.* Professor Briggs presents this proposition as if it were his own discovery, or as a reminder of something forgotten by the Church. Our own observation has not led us to the conclusion that the great danger of our day is the forgetting of the fact that God is love. On the contrary, we were under the impression that the great danger, the great ethical danger, the great theological danger, of our time was the forgetfulness of

* p. 47.

the fact that God was just. We can hardly believe that Professor Briggs, in spite of the barriers and fences which he has torn down, has yet attained to the inner concept of the Bible, when he gives so partial and inadequate account of the Infinite God.

In connection with this view of the love of God, which is only one of the attributes of the Infinite, is the doctrine of election, which Professor Briggs discusses in a remarkable paragraph. We mean that it is remarkable both as coming from a Presbyterian professor of Theology, and remarkable as a specimen of reasoning. It makes one almost suspect that some peculiar organon of logic is in use at Union Seminary, when one finds such an example of reasoning as this :

"Presbyterians have too often limited redemption by their doctrine of Election, The Bible knows no such limitations. The Bible teaches an election, but an election of love. Loving only the elect is earthly, human teaching. Electing men to salvation by the touch of divine love—that is heavenly doctrine." *

"The Bible does not teach universal salvation, but it does teach the salvation of the world, of the race of men, and that cannot be

* p. 55.

accomplished by the selection of a limited number of individuals from the mass."*

There is an old principle: "*Expressio unius, exclusio alterius.*" The word election means choice, and this involves rejection. This was a point strongly emphasized in the discussion about a famous clause in the Westminster Confession, in which, if we are not mistaken, Professor Briggs took a leading part. Objection was made to the term "elect infants," on the ground that it implied that some infants are not elect. There is much confusion in Professor Briggs's reasoning: "Loving only the elect is earthly, human teaching."* Does God then save the non-elect? If so, then does Professor Briggs believe in universal salvation? Evidently he does, for we are told that the love of God is the cause of man's election. We should be pleased to know how it is that God can elect to righteousness, and not reject to damnation, unless, indeed, all men are elected. The dilemma is one which even Professor Briggs can understand; either he is a Universalist, or else he is unable to reason correctly. We do not pause to notice his account of the "Middle State." It is highly imaginative, but, unfortunately, the imagination is not a discursive or reasoning faculty. We might ask, What is the

* p. 55.

difference between the salvation of the universe and the salvation of the world? Professor Briggs contradicts himself when he proceeds to explain that the salvation of the world does not mean the salvation of the world, but only of a great multitude. But he gives no explanation of why the minority of the non-elect are not elected, and we fear that he has not yet learned to be a consistent Pelagian.

And before leaving this subject of the conception of God and of redemption, we feel bound to call attention to the fact that in his synopsis of Biblical Theology Professor Briggs makes no mention of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, of the deity of Christ, except where he warns men against forgetting the Redeemer's humanity, nor of the Person and work of the Holy Ghost. Are these doctrines, then, not taught in the Bible? It is not fair to judge a writer by what he does not say, but after reading Professor Briggs's address one is inclined to suppose that he believes in but one Trinity, consisting of the Bible (the divine authenticity of which he has denied), the Church (in which he has no very great confidence), and the Reason (which in his own case is a singularly untrustworthy and inconsistent guide). And in the entire address, which touches upon so many parts of the the-

ological encyclopædia, there is no mention made of Christ's sacrificial death, and what it means to the world. In Professor Briggs's opinion this may not be an important doctrine of Biblical Theology; but he becomes almost lachrymose over the way in which Christians have treated the resurrection, the enthronement, and other parts of the exaltation of Christ, and exclaims: "Oh, how these have been neglected!"* But the truths of which he speaks have not been neglected, if we may judge by the standards of the Church to which Professor Briggs belongs, unless, indeed, he has torn down a part of that barrier called the *Westminster Confession*, which treats of the exaltation of Jesus Christ, of His resurrection, ascension and reign of grace forevermore. On the other hand, after reading the address, and finding no emphasis laid upon the privations, poverty, passion, and atoning death of the Redeemer, many will feel inclined to reëcho the professor's words: "Oh, how these have been neglected!" These great truths, which are so evidently set forth in the Scriptures from the days of the first paschal feast to the time of the great doxologies of the Apocalypse, are by no means the least important part of "Biblical Theology."

* p. 61.

Professor Briggs follows most infidel writers of our day, in calling the Christian Church to account for its lack of conformity to the teachings, the ethical teachings, of Jesus. The reproof is always needed in this world of sin and sorrow. But such reproof does not come with particularly good grace from one who has not merely distorted the doctrines of the catholic faith, but has cast doubts on the veracity of the word of God, and on the teaching of the Saviour, whose ethics he professes to admire.

How far the Presbyterian clergy and laity generally will be in sympathy with the views of Professor Briggs we have no means of knowing. Nothing could better show his defective apprehension of what his principles involve than this sentence, which is to be found near the close of the address :

"I have not departed in any respect from the orthodox teaching of the Christian Church as set forth in its official creeds."*

If, after this statement, any one cares to defend the professor's logic, he will also be compelled to defend the professor's veracity.

Even if it should be claimed that the teaching of Professor Briggs is not representative of the doctrine of the Presbyterian Church, the fact remains that he is permitted to instruct

* p. 62.

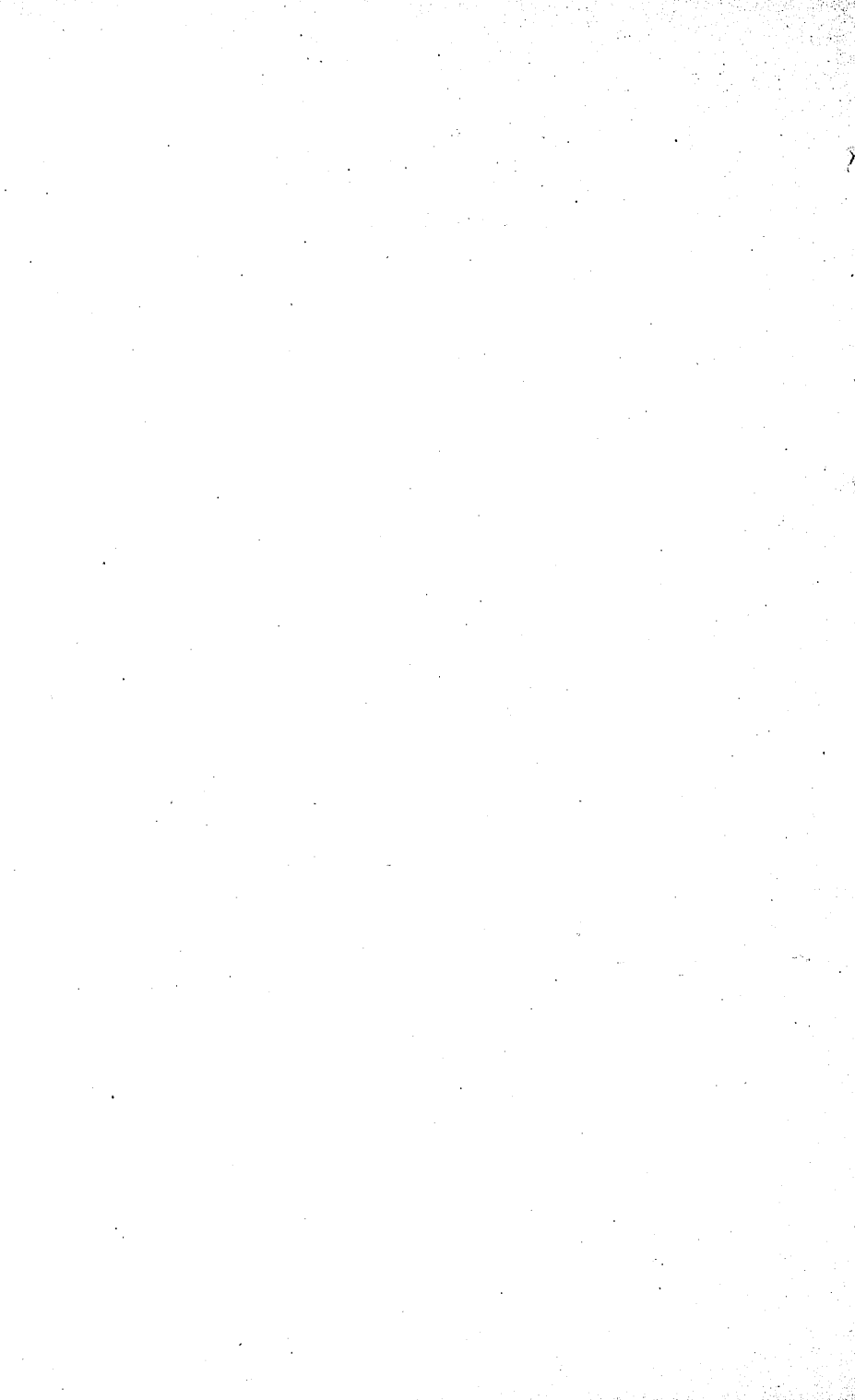
theological students as to what they should believe. It follows, therefore, that if his doctrine is erroneous, those who permit him to retain his position are directly responsible for his errors. In former days the power of the Presbyterian Church was largely dependent on the unity of its doctrine, and its strict defence of its principles. In this it has differed from the Episcopal Church, where the unity has been chiefly a unity of liturgy and polity. When it is said of a man, "He is an Episcopalian," it is impossible to say beforehand whether he would agree with the views of Mr. Heber Newton, or those of the Ritualists. The Presbyterian Church, in so far as we know, has no liturgy, unless those odd bits of chanting and responsive reading which one hears in some Presbyterian congregations, which resemble a badly mutilated version of the Episcopal prayer-book—unless those are to be called a liturgy. Presbyterians have a system of polity. They guard it very jealously, but do not hold it essential that their clergy should believe it to be *jure divino*. But while they are coquetting with the Episcopalians with regard to church union, and while they find the acceptance of the "historic episcopate" a stumbling-block, and a menace to their self-respect, they permit teaching which is virtually a

surrender to the Universalists and Unitarians, a leader of whom their chief apostle Calvin was ready to burn at the stake. Just as the Ritualists imitate the Catholics, so the Presbyterians are borrowing an Episcopalian perruque to cover the "baldness" of Presbyterian worship. And while these brethren are engaged in these inconsistent practices, Protestants seem to be very uneasy at the advance of Rome, and Presbyterians are uneasy over the patronizing attentions of the Protestant Episcopal Bishops; and the questions are agitated, shall there be more than one minister in each Presbyterian Church, or, shall we have a quartette choir, or, shall we have deaconesses? Less attention is paid to what were once called "essential doctrines," and so far as we can discern the signs of the times, the Presbyterian Church is approaching its former Universalistic enemies with a flag of truce. We have no sympathy whatever with those who feel alarm at such teaching as that of Professor Briggs but do nothing to prevent it; and it is difficult to feel respect for a Church which teaches one doctrine in its creed and symbols, and another doctrine in its pulpits and theological seminaries.

Considerable interest has been awakened in some quarters by the change in that clause of

the *Confession of Faith*, in which the pope is referred to as "Antichrist." This change has been regarded as the removal of a barrier between the Presbyterian and the Roman Catholic doctrine. But if there be a danger of Presbyterians being led to look with friendly eyes at the Latin Church, it is to be found rather in attacks like this of Professor Briggs upon the authenticity and authority of the inspired Scriptures. Hitherto the Presbyterian has claimed that his Church is a standing answer to the accusation that Protestantism is a disintegrating force, and that the principle of the private judgment leads logically to infidelity. If statements and arguments like those of Professor Briggs are permitted to go unchallenged in the courts of the Presbyterian Church, there will arise in the minds of many Presbyterians an inclination to enter some religious body which still gives supreme authority to the truths of revelation. Protestants boast of their open Bible. Of what advantage is an open Bible, if it be opened only that it may be mutilated, and torn into as many fragments as there are critics? If Reason is to be the chief arbiter of supernatural doctrine, many will seek for a Church in which, even if the Bible be closed to the laity, it is read with reverence by the clergy. Already we are being told

by Professor Caftan, of Berlin, that there is too much mediævalism about the Protestant religion, and that the Church is but half reformed. The future, we are told, is to give us a new theology, erected on the broken fragments of the old. In view of all this, there are many who, while they are not willing at present to accept the teaching of Rome with regard to the infallibility of the pope, or the doctrine of transubstantiation, and other teaching of the kind, will eventually be glad to find a home in a church which still holds to the religion of supernatural revelation, which does not deny the inspiration of the words of Holy Scripture, and which is far less worthy to be called Anti-christ than such communions as permit their members to put in jeopardy not only the truth of the words of Christ, but also that teaching without which the Church of Christ becomes a society of skeptics, with but little doctrine in common except that of the being of God and of the inestimable value of the Christian consciousness.



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